

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM MEETING NOTES

November 7, 2002, 12:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE OFFICES
PORTLAND, OREGON**

I. Greetings, Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

The November 7, 2002 meeting of the Implementation Team, held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon, was chaired by Jim Ruff of NMFS and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The meeting agenda and a list of attendees are attached as Enclosures A and B.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced in the body of the text may be too lengthy to attach; all enclosures referenced are available upon request from NMFS's Kathy Ceballos at 503/230-5420 or via email at kathy.ceballos@noaa.gov.

Silverberg welcomed everyone to the meeting, led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda.

2. Updates.

A. In-Season Management (TMT). Rudd Turner led this update; he said TMT meetings were held October 8, October 23 and November 1, with upcoming meetings on November 8, November 13 and December 4. We've been working on finalizing the 2003 Water Management Plan and the fall/winter update, he explained; we hope to finalize the latter document at the December 4 meeting. TMT has also been discussing the Bonneville PH2 corner collector construction project, Turner said. We have also been talking about burbot operations; an SOR covering the 2002 operation was submitted in October. The TMT needs to make a decision on the burbot operation soon, he said; as we move into November, our options, in terms of Libby operations, will become fewer.

Chum operations have been a major point of discussion, Turner said; no chum were seen at the November 1 field survey, but we did agree to start the chum operation on November 5. An SOR was discussed at yesterday's TMT meeting, requesting a minimum instantaneous tailwater elevation at Bonneville Dam of 11.5 feet beginning November 1; given current low flows in the river and the fact that chum are only just beginning to arrive on the spawning grounds, at that meeting, the action agencies agreed to maintain a minimum tailwater elevation of 11.3 feet. We're hoping the rain we're supposed to receive over the next week or so will bring tributary flows up, Turner said – we're keeping our fingers crossed.

In response to a question from Jim Athearn, Ruff said Vaughn Paragamian of IDFG will be providing a presentation on burbot life-history at a future IT. That's fine, said Athearn, but what if a burbot-related issue is elevated from TMT to IT in the interim? There is a presentation attached to the September 25 TMT agenda; go to the TMT website to review that, Turner said.

B. Independent Scientific Advisory Board (ISAB). Mike Schiewe reported that the ISAB is working on two fairly large projects, with two more in the queue. The first project is a report on supplementation, a follow-up on a question NMFS posed to the ISAB in 2000 about whether or not there are surplus hatchery fish returning to various hatcheries, and what might be an appropriate use or disposition for those fish. As many of you will recall, said Schiewe, this sparked a fairly large debate in which many of the criticisms levied against the ISAB were broadly interpreted as issues the ISAB was raising about supplementation in general, rather than the specific question of surplus hatchery fish. The questions are:

- Supplementation programs as well as conventional hatchery programs can substantially change the pattern of gene flow among salmon populations. Under what circumstances are these changes likely to be beneficial, and when are they likely to be detrimental to the long-term sustainability of natural populations?
- Supplementation programs can substantially change the demographics of salmon populations. Under what circumstances are these changes likely to be beneficial, and when are they likely to be detrimental to the long-term sustainability of natural populations?

With these two questions in mind, the ISAB has been working to develop a framework built around an outline that includes theoretical information on gene flow and population demographics, Schiewe said. They are also reviewing empirical results from supplementation programs around the basin. There will be some modeling associated with this effort, as well as a section on how one might approach supplementation from a risk management perspective. The target completion date for this project is January 2003.

The second large project the ISAB has undertaken deals with habitat – specifically, the role of habitat in subbasin planning, Schiewe said. How would you consider the role of habitat theoretically, and what tools would be used to identify the importance of various kinds of habitat projects. What would be the characteristics of an ideal tool linking habitat and productivity? It's a very far-reaching question, Schiewe said; this product is expected to be finished in March or April 2003.

The two projects in waiting were both brought to the ISAB by the Council, and also have to do with subbasin planning, Schiewe said – how to factor in both population growth/human demographics and climate change into the subbasin and recovery planning processes.

In addition, we're about three months into a trial phase in which we brought the basin tribes into the management of the ISAB, Schiewe said – we have broadened the ISAB charter to bring a tribal representative into both the administrative oversight level (Don Sampson) and into the operational level (Phil Roger). So far, the arrangement seems to be working well, Schiewe said.

How does the hatchery study link up with the NMFS hatchery policy last spring? Jim Litchfield asked. That has to do with how to deal with hatchery populations in the listing process, Schiewe replied; it's really just a piece of the overall hatchery picture. It's a big project, and it's under construction as we speak. When do you expect the human population impacts and climate change impacts piece be available? Bill Tweit asked. Probably by the end of calendar-year 2003, Schiewe replied.

C. Water Quality Team (WQT). No WQT report was presented at today's meeting.

D. System Configuration Team (SCT). No SCT report was presented at today's meeting.

E. TMDL Update. No TMDL report was presented at today's meeting.

F. Water Quality Plan Work Group. No WQPG report was presented at today's meeting.

3. Overview of the NWPPC's Mainstem Amendment Proposal.

Bruce Suzumoto and John Fazio of the Council staff led this presentation. As many of you know, said Suzumoto, at their last meeting, the Council released a set of draft mainstem amendments to the Fish and Wildlife Program; those draft amendments are available via the Council website (www.nwcouncil.org). The Council, after a lengthy and sometimes painful discussion, was able to agree on a preferred alternative mainstem amendment proposal, Suzumoto said. Probably the most contentious issue was the amount and timing of the flow augmentation strategy, as well as the spill program.

The written comment period on the draft ends on January 10, Suzumoto said. There will be a series of hearings throughout the region, concluding at the January Council meeting in Portland; the schedule of those meetings is also available via that Council website. Once the public comment period ends, the Council will adopt the amendments into the program at either their February or their March meeting, he said.

Fazio reiterated that the Council has a preferred alternative draft amendment, but they are still taking comments on all of the proposed alternatives. He then provided a presentation (also available via the Council website), touching on the following major subject areas:

- Caveats
- Major issues
- Draft mainstem operation – Grand Coulee
- Draft mainstem operation – Libby
- Draft mainstem operation – Hungry Horse
- Draft mainstem operation – Dworshak
- Draft mainstem operation – other issues (maintain current BiOp bypass spill levels at the 4 Lower Snake and 4 Lower Columbia dams --120% gas limit; Provide BiOp specified flows for chum from mid-October to April from Coulee, Libby and Horse – 1283' target takes precedence; provide BiOp specified flows for the Hanford Reach from November to May.)

Fazio provided the following summary of the impacts of the proposed mainstem amendments:

- River flows and augmentation volumes
- Bypass spill
- Reservoir elevations
- Retention time at Grand Coulee

Fazio's final slide was a table showing the generation, cost and flow volumes relative to a "power-only" operation – what the BiOp says, what the proposed draft amendment says, and what the difference is between the two.

Do you have a sense of how much of the differences are due to operational changes at Grand Coulee, rather than changes in Libby and Hungry Horse operations? Bill Tweit asked. Almost all of it, Fazio said – it basically has to do with the elimination of the April 10 refill requirement. It was said during your introduction that the intent of these amendments was to balance fish and wildlife and energy needs, said Ruff – what are those energy needs? The Council's role isn't to balance fish and wildlife, Fazio replied; it is to protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife, while ensuring a consistent and reliable power supply to the region. The short answer is that this proposed amendment would not affect system reliability very much, although it does provide some additional reliability during the winter months. Basically, the Council simply sifted through the recommendations received and developed this package, Fazio said.

A lengthy debate about where these recommendations came from, what they are intended to achieve and what their true impact is, ensued. Tweit commented that a true balance is crucial. Ron Boyce said that, from Oregon's perspective, it is important not to trivialize the 400 kaf reduction in spring flows the Council is proposing – particularly in low-flow years, that 400 kaf could actually be a critical reduction in available flow volume. Fazio agreed with Boyce's comment, noting that, in the driest water years, average flows at McNary during the April-August period could be as much as 10 Kcfs-15 Kcfs lower under the Council's preferred alternative, in comparison to the BiOp operation. That is true in all but the very driest years, when the Council's proposed amendment would actually provide more flow than the BiOp,

Fazio said.

Fazio also described the spill impacts of this proposal, noting that the removal of the April 10 refill requirement results in approximately 1,800 MW-months in additional December-March generation, but only 41 aMW in additional annual hydro generation. Fazio emphasized that the Council does not foresee a system reliability concern this winter. Ultimately, Fazio reiterated that the Council is very interested in any specific comments the states, tribes and federal parties may have on the draft mainstem amendment.

Did you analyze the biological impacts of the preferred alternative? Tom Iverson asked. We did, using the SIMPAS model, which unfortunately is not sensitive to flow changes, Suzumoto replied. He said that, according to his analysis, there is no spring season survival difference associated with the flow changes proposed in the preferred alternative compared to the BiOp; in medium flow years, there could be a slight effect on Snake River steelhead; in low-flow years, there is a very small increase in survival for Mid-Columbia steelhead. In the summer period, there is some negative impact of the proposed alternative (-1.1% to -7.8%) during high-flow years on all of the listed stocks but Snake River spring/summer chinook and Lower Columbia steelhead. The same pattern is true in medium-flow and low-flow years, although the negative impacts are less, Suzumoto said.

4. Hydro System Actions Under Consideration.

Suzanne Cooper of BPA distributed an excerpt from the Action Agencies' 2003-2007 Implementation Plan, titled Section 5.1, "Hydrosystem Priorities." Given BPA's financial situation, Cooper said, we felt it would be appropriate to review the hydrosystem actions in the Implementation Plan to ensure that they deliver maximum biological benefit at least cost. This handout describes a series of configuration and water management alternatives currently under consideration by the action agencies in the NMFS Regional Forum process, Cooper said.

Configuration Alternatives

The intent of the following options is to improve upon existing project survivals, or provide equivalent survival, while reducing spill levels. As we develop options, and if implemented, we would adaptively address necessary spill/operational requirements with the goal of meeting biological opinion performance objectives.

- Accelerate installation of a Removable Spillway Weir (RSW) and Behavioral Guidance System (BGS) at Ice Harbor Dam
- Accelerate installation of an RSW and BGS at Lower Monumental Dam
- Accelerate installation of a forebay physical guidance device at The Dalles Dam and reduce spill from levels called for in the BiOp

Water Management Alternatives

- Discontinue spill at Bonneville Dam to assist passage of Spring Creek Hatchery release

in March. This alternative may involve reprogramming of hatchery funds or other actions to move fish production to facilities below Bonneville Dam.

- Eliminate daytime spill testing at John Day in the spring. Information to date does not show a survival advantage to 24-hour spill for spring migrants. Review of 2002 research is needed to make a determination.
- Test alternative levels of nighttime spill at John Day Dam in the spring. Survival studies at John Day show no significant difference in tailrace egress for 30% and 60% spill levels. Reduced spill levels may not impact survival and would increase generation. Review of 2002 research results is needed to determine what level of immediate spill may be appropriate for testing.
- Modify spill at Ice Harbor to optimize tailrace egress. Reassessment of spill cap based on tailrace condition (similar to what NMFS developed for other projects) will be considered for the summer passage period, and perhaps the spring. Recent evaluation results suggest survival through nighttime spill in the summer is lower than expected.
- Assess whether operations to maintain flows to benefit chum salmon should be consistently maintained through emergence in low water years. This assessment will also take into account Vernita Bar flows.

Cooper also distributed a schematic showing where, within the Regional Forum groups, the conversations about these various alternatives will take place: chum flow and Spring Creek spill at TMT, configuration alternatives at SCT etc. So Bonneville and the other action agencies are committed to using the existing Regional Forum process to make decisions about these alternatives? Tweit asked. Correct, Ruff replied -- that's the take-home message from this agenda item. That being the case, we may test the use of an Executive Committee yet, Tweit observed.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to some of the specific details of these alternatives. Tweit said that the issues he can see resulting from this process are largely budgetary in nature – while SCT is very capable of assessing the technical merits of removable spillway weirs, for example, they are less adept at assessing the kinds of financial impacts necessary to make a “least-cost” judgement. We're all in favor of the same survival at a cheaper cost, he said; we're not so anxious for projects like RSWs to shoulder their way into the queue of projects that have already been prioritized, if their primary purpose is simply to save money for Bonneville. These are very expensive projects, and could necessitate major reprogramming of the CRFM budget, Tweit said.

Actually, there may be a survival improvement associated with RSWs as well, Cooper replied. And that's the kind of debate that can occur at SCT and elsewhere, said Tweit. We've talked about that concept internally at the Corps, and we are very sensitive to it, Jim Athearn replied – the purpose of the RSW technology isn't just to save money. We can't resolve this today, said Tweit, but I wanted the IT to be aware that it is an issue that should be on our radar.

5. Finalize Regional Implementation Forum Guidelines and Procedures.

We have been talking about the revised guidelines since April, and have made a number

of changes to them in the interim, Silverberg said; our goal for today is to finalize and approve them, if possible. At our last meeting, in September, we were unable to have a meaningful conversation about the guidelines due to the lack of state and tribal participants present at the end of the meeting, Silverberg said; we wanted to give those parties an opportunity to provide any comments they may have at today's meeting.

A few additional comments were offered at today's meeting, in particular, concerning the future role, if any, of an Executive Committee, and whether or not the Regional Executives and Federal Executive committee meetings that took place in 2001 are the types of Executive Committee forums the region can expect in the future. Litchfield observed that, from his perspective, the 2001 meetings of the regional and federal executives were too disorganized and loosely-structured to serve the function intended by these guidelines. Dennis Rohr said he has heard that there is some impetus in the region to re-constitute the Regional Forum Executive Committee. I am not aware of any such push, Ruff replied.

Athearn observed that, in his view, it would not be helpful to make the dispute resolution process any easier than it already is – if at all possible, he said, we need to resolve every dispute here at the IT. I agree – the buck should stop here, but we should leave the door open for the Executive Committee to re-convene on any policy issue of regionwide significance, said Ruff. In response to another question, Ruff emphasized that the Executive Committee would be reconstituted only to address major policy issues – operational issues will continue to be resolved at the IT level.

After a few minutes of further discussion, Silverberg said she will leave the references to the Executive Committee in this document and make the last few changes requested. With that, the Regional Implementation Forum guidelines were approved as final.

6. Next IT meeting Date.

The next meeting of the Implementation Team was set for Thursday, December 5 (if an agenda can be developed that warrants having a meeting in December). Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.